

From the Secret Files

WHY THE JFK CASE

The deeper investigators dig into buried documents, the more mysteries they find. Here is an inside look at key issues still unsettled.

Long-secret records, recently disclosed to *U.S. News & World Report*, show why a House committee is calling for a complete reinvestigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination.

Those records raise disturbing questions about the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he gunned down President Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

They also raise questions about the way the killing was investigated—and whether vital information was withheld or suppressed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Here are some of the questions:

- Was Oswald paid \$6,500 in the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City to plot the assassination of President Kennedy, as one witness claimed?

- Why was that witness not questioned more thoroughly? And why were other key witnesses never questioned about Oswald's mysterious visits to Cuban and Soviet officials in Mexico City two months before Kennedy was shot?

- Why was Thomas Mann, then Ambassador to Mexico, ordered by the State Department to drop the investigations of those visits that were being made in Mexico City?

- With Oswald's record—as a defector to Russia who returned to the U.S. with a Russian wife—why was he not under close surveillance when Kennedy made his fatal visit to Dallas?

- Why did the Warren Commission apparently ignore evidence that its own investigators said "points toward a possible conclusion of foreign involvement."

Invoking the Freedom of Information Act, *U.S. News & World Report* asked for and obtained hundreds of pages of previously unpublished records bearing on these and other questions.

Following is a report of what those official records disclose.

OSWALD IN MEXICO CITY

In September of 1963, Oswald went to Mexico City. There he visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies.

According to once-secret CIA files obtained by *U.S. News & World Report*:

- A Nicaraguan named Gilberto Al-



The Kennedys and Texas Governor Connally in Dallas before the assassination. Question that will not die is whether Lee Harvey Oswald, right, acted alone in shooting.



varado Ugarte said he saw Oswald being given \$6,500 at the Cuban Embassy.

- The accompanying conversation overheard by Alvarado indicated that the money was payment for a planned attempt to kill President Kennedy.

As related by the CIA, Alvarado said he saw a group of three persons conversing in a patio of the Embassy. One of them was a "tall, thin Negro with reddish hair, obviously dyed," another was a white person "previously seen carrying a Canadian passport," and the "third person was Lee Harvey Oswald."

Alvarado, according to the CIA account, was "completely convinced from published photos that this was Oswald, not shadow of doubt in his mind."

Here, in the cryptic language of CIA reports, is how the file described Alvarado's testimony:

"Subj [meaning Alvarado] saw tall Cuban join group momentarily and pass American currency to Negro ... Subj overheard following conversation between Negro and Oswald:

"Negro: (in English) I want to kill the man.

"Oswald: You're not man enough. I can do it.

"Negro: (in Spanish) I can't go with you. I have a lot to do.

"Oswald: The people are waiting for me back there.

"Negro gave Oswald 6,500 dollars in

large-denomination U.S. bills, saying "This isn't much." Of sum, 1,500 was for extra expenses."

Later, Mexican authorities told the CIA that Alvarado's "whole story of having seen Lee Oswald receive money in the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City to assassinate President Kennedy was false"—told in the hope it would "induce the U.S. to take stronger action against Cuba," which had become a Communist state under Fidel Castro.

Apparently, authorities in the U.S. accepted the Mexican version. Heavily censored State Department files, recently obtained by this magazine, show U.S. Ambassador Mann was told on Nov. 27, 1963, that the "FBI does not believe at the moment there are any further initiatives we should urge on the Mexicans."

The Ambassador protested in a November 28 message saying:

"I do not pretend that all of this is by any means proof that Oswald was Castro's agent. I understand how fateful might be the conclusion that he was. ... [But] I must also respectfully record my disagreement with my latest instructions that I take no further initiative to encourage the Mexicans to arrest and interrogate."

Mann tried again on November 30 saying: "I still consider that unexplained circumstances suggest possibility of Castro involvement."

IS COMING BACK TO LIFE

Then, on December 3, Mann informed the State Department that Alvarado had retracted his retraction of the payoff story. His message read:

"Conversation took place in presence of two Mexican police officers [deleted] that Alvarado went back to his original story of having witnessed payoff to Oswald in Cuban consulate here.

"Alvarado claims his statement [of retraction] to Mexican authorities was made under duress."

Mann's recommendation was that "there is sufficient possibility of truth" in Alvarado's story to warrant "continued investigation" and further interrogation.

In a recent interview with a member of the staff of this magazine, Mann was asked if he wondered why he was "called off" the Mexican investigation.

"Yes, I wondered quite a good deal," he replied. "It never occurred to me anybody would want to hide any facts showing Castro's implication."

However, he added: "All of us were aware of the fact that if the investigation had definitely established that Castro was involved, that this would have presented a crisis situation between the U.S.

and Cuba, and would have potentially involved the Soviet Union."

Mann pointed out that he did not know at that time that the CIA had plotted several attempts on Castro's life.

Until last year, that information was known only by a small group inside the CIA. Apparently, even the Warren Commission was not told. *It was*

A preliminary report by the House investigating committee last December 31 showed that committee also is concerned about the seeming failure to follow up on the investigation of Oswald's trip to Mexico City. Its report said:

"On Nov. 26, 1976, committee staff questioned extensively an ex-CIA agent regarding his personal knowledge of conversations between Lee Harvey Oswald and personnel within the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City. . . . Based on information obtained . . . staff members were dispatched to Mexico where they located and interviewed new witnesses. These witnesses had never been sought out before by any investigative body, notwithstanding the fact that they had important information concerning statements by Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico within 60 days of the assassination of President Kennedy."

Another witness the committee will seek to question is the mysterious Alvarado, who was deported from Mexico to Nicaragua soon after telling, retracting and retelling his story of a Cuban payoff to Oswald.

OSWALD IN RUSSIA

Gerald Ford, as a member of the Warren Commission that investigated the Kennedy assassination, was intrigued by this strange series of events:

- Lee Harvey Oswald went to Moscow in 1959, declaring his intention to renounce his U.S. citizenship and become a citizen of Soviet Russia.

- The Kremlin apparently greeted him with open arms. He was given a highly paid job in a factory, granted the status of "permanent resident." He married a Russian girl whose uncle was a colonel in the Soviet secret police.

- Yet, in 1962, Oswald was permitted to regain an American passport and return to his homeland as a U.S. citizen, bringing his wife with him as a nonquota immigrant. In the U.S., he loudly proclaimed his admiration for Castro.

- But Oswald was still able to obtain another U.S. passport in 1963 after saying in his application that he intended to travel again to Russia.

Ford's interest is shown in Warren Commission documents now made pub-

lic. Ford, then a member of the House of Representatives, asked Walter Besterman, a House committee aide, to "analyze" the State Department's handling of the Oswald case.

Besterman's analysis said the way the passport case was handled "portrays a complete breakdown of a sensitive administrative operation vitally affecting national security."

Besterman raised a number of questions, including these:

Why was no "lookout" card attached to Oswald's file, which "should have contained the entire history of the events which took place in Moscow?"

Why was Oswald treated differently from other defectors?

Why was there no investigation to establish "the extent of his affiliation or association with the Communist and/or governmental setup?"

Even "a routine inspection of his passport file would have caused denial of passport," the Besterman report said.

Ford sent Besterman's analysis to the Warren Commission's general counsel with a letter endorsing Besterman's "thoroughness and objectivity."

The only reaction shown in the Commission's staff file was this written comment by one investigator: "We should follow up on this completely."

The House committee now investigating the Kennedy case has also shown interest in why closer tabs were not kept on Oswald after his return from Russia.

In its preliminary report, the committee cited the following as an example of "new issues" it wants to pursue:

"Did the Central Intelligence Agency deliberately avoid furnishing critical information to the Federal Bureau of In-

Did Assassins Act Alone? Most Americans Doubt It

According to a recent Gallup Poll, 80 per cent of Americans do not believe the Warren Commission finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The proportion of people who feel that others were involved in the killing has risen significantly. Only 50 per cent expressed that view in a similar poll in January, 1967.

The latest poll, published December 26, also found that 69 per cent of those queried believe that James Earl Ray was not the only person involved in the 1968 killing of the civil rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ray pleaded guilty of the killing and is serving a 99-year sentence. Now he claims that he was "framed." But the Supreme Court has refused to hear his appeal for a chance to change his plea to not guilty.



Richard Sprague heads assassination investigation for House panel.

JFK CASE REVIVED

(continued from preceding page)

vestigation which would have resulted in the surveillance of Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President Kennedy? If so, why?

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT?

William T. Coleman, Jr., now Secretary of Transportation, was a lawyer on the staff of the Warren Commission.

Now disclosed is a 111-page report he made to the Commission about the possibility of foreign involvement in the Kennedy assassination. The first paragraph of that report said:

"The investigation conducted by the section of the staff responsible for the foreign aspects of the Commission's work leads to the conclusion that there was no foreign involvement. Nevertheless, there is evidence which points toward a possible conclusion of foreign involvement which should be brought to the attention of the Commission for its independent evaluation."

The Coleman report related in detail the story of Oswald's three-year stay in Russia and return to the U.S. It described as strange the facts that he could get a Soviet visa so quickly, earn such high pay in a factory job, travel with seeming freedom between Moscow and Minsk, own a shotgun and belong to a hunting club, marry a niece of a secret-police officer and get her out of Russia when he returned to the U.S.

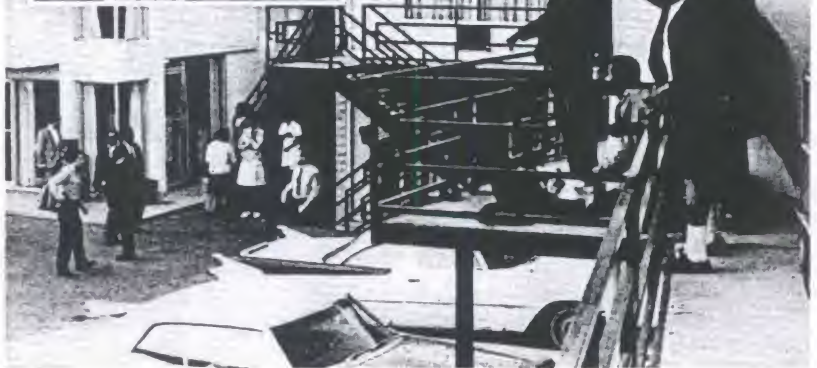
The idea that Oswald might have been "undergoing some sort of training as a future agent of the Soviet system" was examined at length but strongly discounted because of evidence that the Russians regarded him as "not mentally stable and not too intelligent."

The Coleman report took more seriously the possibility that "the Cuban Government might have been involved in the assassination." It cited Oswald's support of Castro, his trip to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City and the fact that "simple retaliation" for the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba "is a motive which must be thoroughly considered."

Finally, the Coleman report turned to the possibility that anti-Castro people might have encouraged Oswald to slay Kennedy, calculating that Oswald would be caught "and the public would then blame the assassination on the Castro Government, and the call for its forceful overthrow would be irresistible."

The report concluded: "The foregoing is probably only a wild speculation, but the facts that we already know are certainly sufficient to warrant additional investigation."

Soon after that recommendation, however, the Warren Commission came



As Martin Luther King lies dying, friends point at source of fatal shot. James Earl Ray, top left, pleaded guilty, but now wants a new trial, claiming he was framed.

The April 4, 1968, assassination of the black civil-rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., is being investigated by the same House committee charged with the Kennedy case.

James Earl Ray pleaded guilty of shooting King in Memphis, Tenn., and is serving a 99-year sentence. But now he claims he was "framed."

The House committee's preliminary report of December 31 shows some of the reasons it wants to reopen that investigation. It said:

"There are reports of intensive surveillance of Dr. Martin Luther King by domestic intelligence agencies, including the FBI. Who and where were those agents at the time of Dr. King's assassination? Do they have any evidence concerning the assassination or any plans to commit it? Was this sur-

veillance deliberately curtailed prior to the assassination? And, if so, why?"

"There are reports that there were unusual transfers of personnel by the Memphis fire and police departments on April 3 and April 4, 1968, which may or may not have affected the security of Dr. King. If so, why were these transfers made and at whose direction?"

Already, the committee said, its investigators have "obtained relevant information from a witness who had never been interviewed before by any investigative agency."

"This witness has stated that James Earl Ray related to him the fact that after Ray fled to Europe, Ray contacted another person from whom he received further instructions to aid in his continuing flight."

out with its finding: no foreign involvement—Oswald acted alone.

AIM: TO SETTLE DOUBTS

Richard A. Sprague, chief counsel and director of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, summarizes why he thinks the killings of both Kennedy and black civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., should be reinvestigated:

"There is this nagging belief in the public mind that more people are involved. If so, these people ought to be brought to justice."

"Even if our investigations merely confirm the original findings, they would be worthwhile. It is just as much our job to go down all of these pathways and disprove some of these theories as it is to uncover some conspiracy."